The Wittiest of Great Musicians

The name of Hans von Bülow holds a unique place in musical art. Intellectually the peer of Wagner and Liszt, as pianist, conductor, composer, and litterateur, his talent commanded worldwide recognition.

His wit alone would have made him famous.

Fearless of friend or foe, always honest in his oftentimes scathing epigrams, if all the bright things that he said had been transferred to paper, they would have filled volumes. Even as it is, their number is innumerable, and still to-day, though he died in 1894, they crop up continually in the memoirs of musicians, who knew him more or less intimately.

Although born an aristocrat, he was ardently republican in his beliefs and tendencies, once exclaiming testily, "No politics, no diplomacy, no concessions, above all no aristocracy, except that of brains and talent!" And he meant it.

Nothing ruffled him more than what appeared to him unnecessary display. In a recital that he was giving, some one sent a laurel wreath in the midst of the program. The moment he caught sight of it on its progress up the aisle, he jumped to his feet, shouting, "Take it out! Take it clear out!" And they very promptly did.

After the recital some friends remonstrated with him. "Think of the feelings of the person who sent it? Think of the regard of the public?"

"I don't need the regard of the public," he returned curtly. "And as for friends, there is no sense in their sending wreaths. If they thoughtfully sent me some salt and pepper with them, I might have them served as a salad; as it is, they are useless."

At another time he heard a young tenor, without either voice or proper schooling, but with wonderful assurance of manner, attempt to sing in concert.

"To sing like that," said von Bülow dryly, "one should be at least attaché of an embassy."

But von Bülow's antipathy to singers, no matter what their renown, if they did not fulfil his ideals, is a matter of history. He it was who said, "A tenor is not a man, he is a disease."

Composers came in for their share of his irony as well, no matter what traditional reverence they inspired in others. One night, playing for some friends in private, the piano stool was too low for comfortable command of the keyboard. Turning to Pohl, the critic, he said gaily, "Give me something to sit on! Have you Haydn's 'Seasons'? No, I am still too low," he added, when handed the score. "See if you can find Mendelssohn's 'Spring Song.'"

Five languages von Bülow spoke fluently, not only commanding a great vocabulary, but coining, sometimes, expressions of his own. An instance of this is in a letter giving his views on the Knabe Pianos, of which he was an enthusiastically ardent admirer. "As I met with frequent opportunities of establishing comparisons between Knabe Pianos and instruments of rivalizing or **would-rivalizing** producers, I dare now add that I declare them **the absolutely best in America."**

In **would-rivalizing** he meant to convey his opinion of the futility of all other efforts compared with the achievements that went to make his favorite piano, clinching his assertion with the concise expression of one thoroughly versed in English, not putting it as absolutely the best, but, "the absolutely best in America," thus making his use of the word "absolutely" yet more sweeping.

Pianists came in for their separate share of his truth-speaking; even Anton Rubinstein, his good friend, did not escape. "I wish," he said meditatively, after a concert in which Rubinstein struck more than the usual number of false notes for which he was noted,—"I wish that I could accept all my false notes as amiably as he does. But," he added hastily, "it is much more interesting to hear what he plays falsely than what thousands play correctly."

At one time on his door he had this notice posted, "Before noon, not receiving; afternoon, out."

But he was good hearted, often to a fault; under his brusk manner there was a wealth of genuine feeling. A young pianist, anxious for a word of criticism on her playing, cast down by this same notice at the end of her pilgrimage to him, happened later that same day to be introduced to von Bülow. On the spot he volunteered to conduct the orchestra in her next concert, and to play with her a duet for two pianos.

The impression that he made by good deeds or rebuffs was, to him, immaterial, and he once remarked in giving serio-comic advice with an air of great earnestness, "It is far better to make an unpleasant impression, than to make no impression at all."

Naturally, young musicians journeyed from all quarters for the privilege of studying with him. To them, spurred, doubtless, by some very bad varieties of playing, he gave advice often bristling with sarcasm. To good, talented students, what he said mattered little, as long as they had the inestimable advantage of his teaching; they learned to look for his caustic expressions, in fact, almost as part of the lesson's routine, and treasured them sufficiently to put them later on paper. For years yet to come there is small doubt that anecdotes of von Bülow will continue to crop out in print, as one after another of his old pupils compiles some biographical fragment.

Of his opinions of pianos, quite as humorous things might be recorded as any he may have said to his pupils; for he was as utterly regardless of feelings, and as fearlessly honest in what he said of makes and makers of his chosen instrument.

Truth with him was a possessing mania, and if he felt he had not told it completely, he was willing to return and assert that which at a previous moment he had, perhaps, forgotten.

This is a sentence on which he laid the stress of italics when he wrote it: **"That sound and touch of the Knabe Pianos are more sympathetic to my ears and hands than sound and touch of any other pianos in the United States."**

One of the most amusing episodes of von Bülow's life happened at Milan when Luigi Erba, a wealthy musician, and at one time first piano teacher at the Milan Conservatory, invited two hundred persons to meet him at an evening party at his palace near the Porta Garibaldi.

Eight, half-past eight, nine, o'clock struck; but there came no von Bülow.

At the musician's hotel the embarrassed Erba's messenger was advised to try a noted German restaurant not far away; maybe he was there. And there he was, seated at table with a few congenial spirits, engaged with a few beer mugs and a few cigars. The invitation had entirely escaped him.

At last he arrived at the Erba Palace, full two hours late. Outwardly suave and calm, but easily seeing the irritation he had awakened, and not without a respectable-sized irritation of his own at being torn from congenial colleagues, he seated himself at once at the piano.

Cold-blooded and leisurely, he struck a few chords, as was his custom, to fix attention and bring the entire company together.

Suddenly he shouted in faultless Italian, "Ladies and gentlemen, I will now play some Beethoven,—the Sonatas opus 101, opus 106, opus 109, opus 110, and opus 111,—**just a little.**" People gazed at one another in horror at the prospect; but already von Bülow was playing. And, true to his announcement, he kept on playing until he had finished every sonata.

Meanwhile, one by one, the guests had crept away, unable to support the occasion. Only a few courageous ones still lingered when he had finished. Then, rising, suave and calm, he looked about him at the depleted company. "I fear," he said in clear tones,—"I fear that our friends are not fond of Beethoven."

Then he said good-night and left. But for years afterward "just a little" was a joke among musical people in Milan.

But the great artist will have his moods; without them he would fall short of being a great artist at all.

To express those moods, endless and various, he must have a perfect instrument, of supreme qualities, on which to express them. Otherwise the most ardent and subtle of his efforts will be in vain.

Fearless, relentlessly honest, determined always to be upright and truthful in all things, von Bülow's character—so strongly evidenced in the stories of his life here recounted—is set forth with equal forcefulness in the following letter, well worth the reading, as the sincere expression of a great musician, who willingly staked his worldwide reputation on what he knew to be an invincible truth.

It is dated Hamburg, the twenty-seventh of May, 1890, addressed to William Knabe, Baltimore, Maryland, and reads:

"My renewed and by more use—under aggravating circumstances, as bad health and tiresome traveling—enlarged experience of your pianos this (second and last transatlantic) season has throughout confirmed myself in the opinion I expressed last year, *viz.*: **that sound and touch of the Knabe Pianos are more sympathetic to my ears and hands than sound and touch of any other pianos in the United States.** As I met with frequent opportunities of establishing comparisons between Knabe Pianos and instruments of rivalizing or would-rivalizing producers, I dare now add that I declare them **the absolutely best in America**. With sincere regards, yours truly, Dr. HANS VON BÜLOW."

Few stop to think or realize what an absolutely perfect piano means to a great artist concertizing the length and breadth of a vast country, where he is a stranger. It becomes the best friend in the world in which he is then living, the one friend that completely understands and faithfully responds to his every thought and emotion.

All the world of friends and associations in which he has lived in his home land left far behind, his chosen make of piano, speaking under his fingers in city after city, receiving his last confidence at night and his first in the morning, becomes a living, breathing thing to him; its companionship is the best-beloved in all that trying period.

Because of these things, a great artist, especially a great artist of von Bülow's type, becomes most exacting; having but one close friend, that friend must combine all the perfections to be absolutely sympathetic, must be capable of realizing his loftiest ideals, his tenderest flights of fancy. And all these supreme exactions of von Bülow the Knabe Pianos met, surpassing, in the **"frequent opportunities of comparisons,"** of which he speaks, **All Other Pianos.** What grander tribute could von Bülow bestow upon his best friend,—**The Knabe Piano?**

REMARKABLE ATHLETES

By W. R. C. Latson, M.D.

THE athlete is always interesting. In all ages he has commanded the interest and admiration of his fellows. Rough pictures scratched on stone by primeval man, pictures made long before the invention of writing, show that even in those early days there was appreciation of physical powers.

The myths of the early ages are crowded with stories of the magnificent feats achieved by their heroes. There was Hercules, whose character and achievements are said to have been drawn from the Judaic hero, Samson. Like Samson, Hercules slew a lion with his hands, conquered armies single handed, and accomplished many other marvelous tasks. The stories of Hercules, Antinous, Paris, and other Olympian heroes are, of course, purely mythical and allegorical, and are mentioned here merely to show the early interest and appreciation of physical powers.

At a later period we have records of athletic feats, which, while often inaccurate, are undoubtedly based on actual fact. These feats are often referred to by unthinking or uninformed people as being immeasurably beyond what the modern athlete could accomplish. But, when closely examined and stripped of their obviously mythical "trimmings," the achievements of the ancient athletes are usually found to have been quite commonplace and credible.

Milo's Spectacular Feat

TAKE for instance the story of Milo, the most famous athlete of ancient times. Milo's most spectacular feat was to take on his back a four-year-old heifer and carry it round the stadium. Now, the animal may have weighed anywhere from four hundred to eight hundred pounds; and the distance round the stadium we know to have been exactly two hundred and twenty yards, that is, one-eight of a mile.

Whether this story is true, no one can tell; but there is no good reason why it should not be; for the feat is by no means incredible or even unique. The Turkish porters of Constantinople frequently make long journeys bearing on their shoulders a weight of six hundred pounds, which is quite as much or even more than Milo's burden is said to have been.

It is further told that after Milo had finished his circuit of the stadium with his bovine burden, he killed the animal with a single blow of his fist. If it is assumed that his blow was struck with his bare fist, the story is rather too much for belief. The Greek boxers, however, always used the cestus, a bulky apparatus not unlike the boxing glove, but extending nearly to the elbow and heavily weighted with lead. Armed with such a weapon, any good heavyweight pugilist like Sullivan, Jeffries, or Sharkey would have little difficulty in slaying a cow with a single blow. So, after all, the story of Milo is not so incredible as it seems at first sight.

Then there is the well known story of Leander, who swam the Hellespont with the praiseworthy object of passing an hour in the presence of his sweetheart. Now, the body of water known in ancient times as the Hellespont is in these days called the Straits of Dardanelles, and the distance across it is rather less than a mile. Compared with such a swim as that of Captain Webb across the Straits of Dover, a distance of twenty-one miles, Leander's performance seems not only credible but even insignificant.

In a word, there is no doubt that athletes and strong men of modern times are far more powerful and skilful than those whose performances seemed so wonderful to the ancients.

Some Modern Athletes

AMONG the notable athletes of modern times, perhaps the most remarkable was Ernest Menson, a sailor in the British navy. On a certain occasion, finding himself penniless in London, and knowing that he must reach his ship at Portsmouth by rollcall or be shot as a deserter the next morning, he ran the entire distance between the two cities, starting at half after eight in the evening and arriving at his destination by six the next morning. That is to say, he covered the entire distance of sixty-nine miles in less than ten hours. His next run was from London to Liverpool, a distance of two hundred miles, which he covered in exactly thirty-three hours.

A still more remarkable pedestrian feat was his famous run from Paris to Moscow, a distance that in those days was seventeen hundred and sixty miles. Menson started from the Place de Vendome in Paris at exactly ten o'clock on the morning of June 11, 1831, and arrived at the Kremlin in Moscow at ten o'clock, June 25, having made the journey in three hundred and thirty-six hours.

Menson never walked, but went at a "dog trot," a gait similar to that of Rowell, a famous pedestrian of twenty years ago. He was also peculiar as to eating and sleeping. On his journeys he ate nothing except occasionally a little fruit or a cracker; but would drink much water. His rest was taken in a standing position, usually leaning against a wall or a tree. After ten or fifteen minutes of this rest he would awaken and go on apparently as fresh as ever. On one occasion during a long run he went up as usual and leaned against a tree to rest. His seconds and attendants standing about had noticed nothing unusual in his manner or appearance. Ten minutes passed, fifteen, thirty. The watchers went closer, and found that Menson was dead.

One of the most remarkable feats of strength on record was the platform lift made by Patrick McCarthy, of St. Louis. The platform was loaded with stones; and McCarthy, standing under it, lifted with arms, legs, and back, "harness" style. The weight of the platform and stones was sixty-three hundred and seventy pounds, or over three tons.

Another American athlete, A. Cutter of Louisville, once placed his little finger in a strap suspended from the ceiling, and, from hanging thus at arms' length, drew the body up to the chin six times in succession. With one hand on a horizontal bar he drew the body up six times without pause.

For drawing the body up, "chinning the bar," as they say in the gymnasiums, the palm goes to Arthur Mumford, who in 1888 at Cambridge, Massachusetts, performed the feat thirty-nine times without pause.

Another interesting athlete is Nouroulah, the Great Bulgarian wrestler. He is probably the biggest athlete in the world. His height is six feet seven inches, and he weighs three hundred and thirty pounds. He is just five feet round the chest, about twice the measurement of the ordinary man, and measures nearly two feet about the upper arm. In spite of his great bulk, Nouroulah is surprisingly quick and skilful; and as a wrestler has proved himself practically invincible.

The list would be incomplete without the name of Ralph Rose, giant amateur athlete and law student of the University of Michigan. Rose is only a youngster, being not more then twenty-three years old. Physically, however, he is a marvel. He stands six feet three inches and weighs two hundred and fifty pounds. He is said to be possessed of the most perfect physique ever examined at the University of Michigan. Rose holds several world's records, and is mentally and physically a born athlete. He grew up in Sonoma County, California, among the giant trees.

THE WORLD'S SMALLEST ARMIES

ONE hears much of the enormous military forces of Germany, France, Russia, and the other great Powers; but what of the smallest armies of the world? The most diminutive is that of the principality of Monaco, numbering seventy-five guards, seventy-five carbineers, and twenty firemen. Next comes Luxemburg, with one hundred and thirty-five gendarmes, one hundred and seventy volunteers, and thirty-nine musicians.

In the little Republic of San Marino the Government stands ready to place in the field nine companies, comprising nine hundred and fifty men and thirty-eight officers, commanded by a marshal. On a "peace footing" this Republic can place only one company of sixty men on the parade ground.

In the Republic of Liberia an amusing feature of the military organization is the proportion of officers to privates; there being some eight hundred of the former and only nine hundred of the latter. Nevertheless, the Black Republic, in the event of the declaration of a war, promptly issues its proclamation of neutrality as between the Powers of Europe.